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SENSITIVE
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E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: UPDATE ON OCTOBER 30 TERRORIST ATTACKS IN ASSAM

REF: KOLKATA 301

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Assam police have confirmed that there were 9 serial blasts on October 30 in the Northeast Indian state of Assam, causing 77 deaths so far. Bomb experts are investigating the nature of the explosives that caused unusual amounts of damage. A very slow reaction by first responders and anger over the government's failure to protect people from terrorism led to mob violence and imposition of curfew soon after the blasts. Police suspect Islamic extremists may be responsible for the blasts with assistance from ethnic secessionist group United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA). Communal tensions are likely to rise in Assam, a state bordering Bangladesh. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) The Director General of Assam Police R.N. Mathur told PolFSN that 9 blasts occurred simultaneously on October 30 (see Reftel). He said the official death toll is 77, with more than 400 injured. He explained that forensic experts are investigating the nature of the explosives used, but they were undeniably very high intensity and the amount of damage is unprecedented in Assam. The bombs were left in cars, bikes, bicycles or simply on the pavement and locations in crowded places. The bombs are believed to have had timer devices. There is no information yet that any suicide bombs were used.

¶3. (SBU) While the curfew imposed in Guwahati, Assam's capital, was lifted on the evening of October 30, a statewide alert continues. The fires on the streets have been extinguished. In many areas, shops and business establishments remained closed and the state is quiet, with most people staying indoors. Police reportedly have begun detaining people for questioning in connection with the serial bombings. Contacts told PolFSN that Union Home Minister S. Patil is scheduled to visit Assam on October 31.

¶4. (SBU) Immediately after the explosions in Guwahati on October 30, people attacked security personnel and shouted slogans against the government, accusing the government of failing to provide security for people. Some protesters tried to enter the government secretariat with burned bodies. Police first used a baton charge to disperse protesters, but when this did not work they fired in the air and imposed a curfew. A police contact told PolFSN that since the administration failed to mobilize public opinion against terror, the Assamese people vent their anger at government officials who enjoy security escorts while the average person remains vulnerable. Victims or their family do not focus on the terrorists who caused violence, but they do see an administration that cannot protect them.

¶5. (SBU) The ULFA has denied its involvement in the blasts. According to media and police contacts, ULFA issued a statement alleging that "the blasts have been triggered by Indian occupation forces to scuttle efforts by the ULFA to seek a peaceful political solution to India-Asom conflict." Police contacts suspect that Islamic extremists masterminded the

attacks, but with support from ULFA. R. Chandranathan (protect), Inspector General Special Task Force, told PolFSN that he believes the explosives used were not made locally. He said the impact is much worse than ever in the past in Assam where ULFA has regularly launched bomb attacks. He observed that this attack was very well planned and that, in his view, the planning did not take place in Assam. He speculated that the "major players" were probably across the Bangladesh border, and that they used local Assamese for implementation. In his opinion, ULFA has been weakened in recent months and is desperate to keep its presence alive. Western Assam, where some explosions occurred, is about six hours from Sherpur district in Bangladesh where ULFA has camps.

Comment

¶6. (SBU) Northeast India, including Assam, has historically been excluded from the Indian "mainstream" and GOI's decades-long neglect has contributed to the ascendance of ethnic militant movements in the region. While ethnic Assamese people - both Hindu and Muslim - usually live in harmony, public anger against Muslim migrants from Bangladesh is on the rise. The October 30 blasts are likely to trigger greater tensions between communities, as people perceive that terrorists are infiltrating Assam's borders with Bangladesh. End comment.

PAYNE